THE CLASS DIVIDE IN URBAN INDIAN YOUTHS' LIVES; THEIR TIME-USE AND ADAPTIVE FUNCTIONING

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Summary

The purpose of the present study was to investigate the lives of Indian youth aged 10 to 15 from low, middle and high Socio-Economic Status (SES) backgrounds in terms of how they spend their time. We held interviews with youths to reconstruct the preceding day in ten minute time slots. We did this for at least one weekday and one weekend day with each child. The records were categorized into categories such as sleep, labour, screen time, physical activity time and academic work time and scored in order to quantify them. The time spent on particular activities was analysed in relation to youth characteristics like SES and schooling opportunities but also in relation to their physical development, linguistic competence and mental health. The study was comparative in nature in that we compared the lives of rich and poor Indian urban youth and highlighted the related differences in terms of schooling opportunities and subsistence methods and more generally in terms of differences in time-use.

Our study is the first and only youth time-use study conducted in the state of Maharashtra, India and one of very few conducted in India. It is also the only Indian study that uses the time spending methodology with youth represented from a very diverse range of socio-economic classes, including minimally literate school-going youth. There is a gap in available data and information from the lowest economic groups on time-use variables such as sleep, physical activity, academic work time and screen time because most Indian studies focus only on child labour. Our study aimed to overcome this knowledge gap. The present study ensured uniformity, reliability and validity in data-collection methodology and coding, by not only training research assistants in administering interviews but also in coding.

Chapter two of this thesis was about the educational and developmental contexts of Pune youth. According to a 2013 statistic, over 43% of school-going children in Pune, were enrolled in private schools that year, a 15% increase since 2009. School drop-out rates are high, especially in public schools. There is clearly a private school advantage over public schools with differences in presence or absence of state funding and private fee structures, infrastructure, teacher qualifications, student profiles and their economic status. Adolescent participation in paid and unpaid work is usually seen in lower income families. After-school academic or school-related activities as well as family obligations taking priority over other types of recreational activities, is not uncommon in Urban India. Television use, mobile use, and internet use are becoming increasingly popular and extensively used, amongst all classes of urban Indian's. Especially in the lower classes, it is not uncommon to have the television playing in the background for the entire evening on a weekday, or throughout the day on weekend days. This chapter was about the physical and social settings of Indian youth from rich and poor backgrounds. It also dealt with the historically constituted Hindu customs and practices of child-rearing as well as the parental ethnotheories that justify, reinforce, or guide these practices.

In the third chapter we then examined the reliability, concurrent and predictive validity of the Family Affluence Scale (FAS II) scores. We found acceptable reliability scores for the FAS II among youth in India. The FAS II scores of the youth correlated with their attendance of private and public schools and caste membership. Furthermore, FAS II scores correlated with parental education and employment level, and home environments as measured by an adapted version of the HOME inventory. The FAS II was also predictive of the physical indices weight, length and body mass index, so that overall we concluded good concurrent and predictive validity for FAS II scores among youth in India. In our study we used the FAS II for assessing youth's Socio-Economic Status (SES) background.

We then studied if SES and sleep duration were mediated by how much time youth spend in physical activity, screen time, and academic work. We found that the highest SES children reported almost an hour and a half less sleep than their lowest SES counterparts. The lower SES children reported more physical activity and screen time, and the higher SES children reported spending more time on academic work. In spite of the fact that more screen time was related to a lower sleep duration, academic work was the strongest mediator between SES and sleep duration. We found that physical activity, however, was not a significant mediator. In India high academic demands are a strong predictor of a lower sleep duration among children and adolescents.

Chapter 5 dealt with whether the time-use categories child labour, academic work and sleep mediated the relation between Socio-Economic Status (SES) and linguistic and mental health outcomes. We found that the lowest SES youth engaged in more child labour and sleep but spent less time on academic activities than their high SES counterparts. Child labour was predictive of lower mental health scores and lower English language proficiency. Moderated mediation analyses suggested that the relation between linguistic outcomes and academic timeuse was stronger for impoverished children than for affluent children. For poorer children, spending more time on academic tasks may be more beneficial than for their richer counterparts. Unfortunately, a significant correlation between time spent on academic work and time spent on child labour could mean that the time poor children have for studying gets displaced by child labour. Sleep was not significant and it is possible that although sleep duration for some children was less than is customary for Western children, this did not meet a cut off for sleep deprivation.

We knew that time-use impacts developmental trajectories and life chances. For the current study we predicted therefore that time-use patterns and outcomes would be dependent on SES. India made an ideal destination to study rich and poor contrasts due to the existence of both extremes in comparable niches. We also know that children born into poverty experience persistent and higher levels of physical, mental and academic disadvantage. In Pune, a higher number of such youth came from lower castes and went to public schools. They lived in more crowded homes with parents who were lesser qualified and educated, and held jobs that were more menial. Such youth tended to sleep more, engage in more screen time and be more physically active. They also engaged in more child labour, and less academic work time. Developmental consequences were worse for such youth, with higher chances of them being underweight or stunted, scoring lower on linguistic tests and scoring higher on tests indicating the existence of internalizing and externalizing problems. It was seen that when poorer students spent time on academic work, this benefited their language proficiency more than it benefitted richer children.

Given its importance, we end with a focus on child labour. As shown by the current study as well as by other studies, child labour in the Indian context is a liability to child and youth development. There is a growing concern for youth health making it imperative that future public health policies and practices in India address all forms of child labour as a risk and burden for mental health.